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THE TABOOS WE LIVE BY

By FRANK CHODOROV

EXCEPT IN ITS OCCULT ASPECTS, the custom of taboos is not confined to primitive peoples. Every age and every society has had its quota of "Thou shalt nots", and the higher the civilization the more numerous its interdictions, and the more force do they carry. Only in the most sophisticated circles does one hear the phrase, "such things simply are not done".

Among intellectuals — who pride themselves on their objectivity — the habit of banishing "unclean" thought is most prevalent and most virulent. For instance, the word McCarthy is unmentionable in such circles, except with overtones of disgust, even as primitive peoples spoke of scrofula. This presents a strange anamoly. It is because they claim an unique capacity for examining data without prejudice that these people demand for themselves a special dispensation, known as "academic freedom"; their dicta, or how they got to them, is beyond the comprehension of the unwashed, who are therefore presumptuous when they question the oracular wisdom of the anointed. Yet the attacks of these superior people on McCarthy and McCarthyism — which includes the Jenner Committee — display the venom of an aboriginal tribe toward anyone on whom the medicine man has laid the mark; indeed, their attitude seems to be that they need no facts to support their verdict of untouchableness.

But, the subject is taboos, not McCarthyism. And the point is that as society advances in knowledge and becomes more complex, the tendency is to increase, rather than diminish, the areas of prohibited thought and behavior. The difference between the civilized taboos and those of the primitive peoples is a matter of rationalization; the primitive man accepts the word of his medicine man without question while the civilized man expects his lawmaker or his high priest to support every ban with a reason. When you examine the reason, however, you find that it rests on an unprovable axiom, a taboo. Thus, "isolationism" must be declared unclean in order to justify foreign spending.

As an example of how taboos proliferate, let us examine the one so integrated into our civilization that we are pleased to give it divine authority: "Thou shalt not steal".

Now, this taboo may have been imposed in the beginning by a wise ruler or a high

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priest with a sense of economics; we have reason to believe that stealing was at one time not considered irregular, and it is likely that the consequent disruption of the social order may have been the origin of the taboo. Regardless of origin, the recognition of the social undesirability of stealing gave particular force to this taboo. So much so that ostracism befell the violator; he was stoned, or jailed. It became an inherent taboo.

As stealing diminished under the impact of the taboo, society flourished and derivative taboos sprang up. Today, the man who breaks a contract, even a verbal one, becomes unclean because in doing so he violated the original "thou shalt not steal". The same curse falls on one who repudiates a "debt of honor", while the one who plagiarizes — steals ideas — is looked upon as the savage looked upon the leper. Out of one taboo came a number.

TABOOS COME AND GO, like styles of clothes. Sometimes they spring from ignorance or fear; sometimes they are imposed on society by self-seekers; sometimes they grow out of social experience. Even a deranged mind can set a virulent taboo on its way. There are many millions of people today to whom the word "capital" is vile, and when you get to the bottom of this phenomenon you come to a book, *Das Kapital.* Try reading this book, try to follow its so-called reasoning, its contradictions in logic and misrepresentation of facts, and you are forced to the conclusion that the mind that conceived it was at least off balance. Yet, the curse he put on a useful word has influenced thinking no end, more particularly the thinking of the self-styled intellectuals.

In the Christian ethos there is a taboo which says, "thou shalt not bear false witness". Yet, a sizable population, including some Christian preachers, reject this taboo when it conflicts with their taboo on capitalism. To these folks the mark of evil is on those who believe in the sanctity of private property. Therefore, bearing false witness against these "enemies of progress" — by way of propaganda, espionage and hiding behind the Fifth Amendment — is all in line with the noble work of destroying a social leprosy.

Taboos have played a big part in shaping the institution of sovereignty. When kings ruled by divine right, it followed that their persons and their rulership must be surrounded with a moat of prohibitions; their kinship to God cloaked them with an aura of mystery. If they hadn't acted up like ordinary mortals, that taboo shelter might have protected them indefinitely. However, kings did not live up to their reputation and the sheltering taboos wore thin; then they were replaced by a set of "thou shalt nots" for the protection of the ruled. This was called constitutionalism.

The American Bill of Rights is a set of taboos; and supplementing it are derivative taboos called "checks and balances". The basis for these prohibitive injunctions on government is the concept of natural rights, which is a pure assumption. No medicine man ever thought up anything more unprovable. We assume that the individual is endowed

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with inalienable rights because if we don't we are driven to the conclusion that might makes right, and that is nonsense.

Having asserted the premise of natural rights, we automatically put a curse on any act or thought that is violative of it, and the person who makes light of our assumption becomes suspect of evil purpose. In fact, he is low enough to be a "Commie".

Taking our American culture as a whole, its earmarks are the Ten Commandments and the Bill of Rights, consisting entirely of prohibitory or inhibitory injunctions; and that, in the final analysis, is the substance of taboos.

TABOOS ARE NOT ONLY transitory, they are frequently at war with other taboos. And that brings us back to the self-styled intellectuals who insist that their minds are purged of such nonsense. When you lay open their ideas, as expressed in their textbooks on economics and social philosophy, you find that the abolition of taboos is furthest from their purpose; they are merely plugging for a new set of taboos to replace those that have been in vogue for more than a century.

For instance, the basic taboo in our culture is "thou shalt not steal". Behind it is an axiom, the axiom of private property; for it is obvious that one cannot steal what is not owned. When — as many textbooks do — it is asserted that there is no such thing as an inherent right to property, that the tribe, acting through its police, is quite in order when it confiscates property, the purpose is to substitute for "thou shalt not steal" a taboo that sounds like "thou shalt not own".

When Patrick Henry said that he would as soon be dead as to be without liberty, he merely voiced a taboo that had already become inherent in the American culture: "Beware of the State". For, it was an established fact, in those days, that liberty was something the individual was born with, and that the State was inclined to whittle it away. It was to put a brake upon this inclination that the ten taboos were incorporated in the Constitution. These are the ten ways, declares the Bill of Rights, in which the State may afflict the people; it is an incipient plague and must be watched.

Judging by some of their textbooks, the medicine men of the campus are telling us that far from being an instrument fraught with evil, the State is in fact the one and only means for furthering the fortunes of the tribe. No taboo should prevent it from pursuing that purpose. Rather, it is the individual who is contaminated. He is weak and incontinent and needs to be protected from himself by way of "social security". He is avaricious and therefore must be held in check by all sorts of controls. He is ambitious and therefore must be deprived of the means — property — by which his ambition can thrive. He has a wild appetite and will produce only what he desires if left alone; therefore, his energies must be channeled into a purposeful pattern, whether he likes it or not.

The very fact, continues the self-anointed priesthood of the ivory tower, that the individual claims to be endowed by God with rights is proof that he is possessed of a demon. For, there are no such rights. What he pleases to call rights are merely per-

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missions granted to the tribe, acting through its all-wise and all-powerful agency, the State. These the State gives or withdraws at will.

In short, the mark of evil is on the individual, not the State.

SO, THE BATTLE OF TABOOS is on. It is an unending battle, having started when men first began living in communities. Even in the beginning, when the Jews demanded of Aaron that he make them a Golden Calf, they in effect countermanded the interdiction that Yahweh had put on graven images, substituting for it an interdiction on the Mosaic tablets. The intellectuals of the Middle Ages burned at the stake those who presumed to seek truth in the facts of nature rather than by *a priori* reasoning. And when the scientists got their innings, they put a taboo on all knowledge that could not be reduced to mathematical formulae; science laid an anathema on philosophy.

The battle of taboos stems from man's unending search for ultimate good in this world. When he thinks he has hit on the right formula, he labels the opposite as bad and puts a malediction on it. Eventually the magic formula turns out to be inadequate and then he switches his taboos.

For centuries all good was defined by status; it was good that every man should be content with that station in life to which nature had assigned him. During these centuries anyone who deigned to disturb the status was by common agreement possessed of evil. But, life under status did not bring happiness, and in due time its critics brought forth the doctrine of *laissez-faire,* or freedom of choice; and for two centuries now, in most countries, status has been excommunicated. Now *laissez-faire* has fallen into disrepute, because it did not bring the expected shower of manna; all it did was to give the individual an opportunity to work out his own welfare, and nobody really wants to work. So, the current crop of medicine men, acting in character, are concocting a new brew of status, which they call socialism; they are in effect trying to impose a taboo on freedom of choice.

When the degree-bedecked practitioners hurl imprecations at those who cling to the doctrine of *laissez-faire* — such as "reactionary", "fascists", "illiberal", and the like — the purpose is not so much to smear the character of these people as to ease into our mores a new set of taboos. They would erase from our consciousness the Ten Commandments and the Bill of Rights, and would substitute for these traditional prohibitions the taboos derived from Hegel and Marx. They would restore idolatry of the State by destroying the dignity of the individual. They would equate freedom with slavery.

That is the current battle of taboos. Which code will we decide to live by? That is the real issue of the day.

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HUMAN EVENTS

FRANK C. HANIGHEN, *Editor* FRANK CHODOROV, *Associate Editor*

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What Price Liberal Republicanism? The unfavorable verdict at the polls was pronounced — not on the Republican Party as a whole, but on that wing which has been running the new Administration since last January. That section of the party may be not unfairly termed "liberal", or in political parlance, the "me-too" wing. These words embrace the whole class of GOP politicos who for many years have claimed they could do what the New Deal did, only better (such as Willkie in 1940, Dewey in 1944 and 1948).

True, this classification has exceptions, as to policies and as to official individuals. But by and large the conservative utterances of the Eisenhower regime have been diluted and the prevailing tone has been "middle-of-the-road", or "liberal". The "new faces" in the Executive branch illustrate this. Prominent have been the station wagon set, the followers of the New York *Herald Tribune* line, New Deal Democrats who have infiltrated into the GOP setup, one-world fanatics and the Dewey crowd who grabbed off much of the patronage. These are the folk who have run the administration since inauguration and who must bear the responsibility. They have not, it is clear, done brilliantly.

The significant line in the press today is "the vote was light". Naturally. The millions who had voted for Ike in the industrial states, because they hated Truman's protection of the Communists, had little reason to heed Ike's appeal to go to the polls for the GOP. For, the vicious campaign waged right from the White House against Senator McCarthy did not go unnoticed. Nor did many wage-earners, disgruntled over the tribute they have to pay their union leaders, approve the appeasement of these bosses which has marked White House policy.

What apparently brought millions to the voting booths last year was a popular revolt against Trumanism — that is, official appeasement of Communists and labor bosses. But it is an essential element of "me-tooism" to appease such elements — and thus it was done since last winter. It should not have, therefore, proved surprising when many disappointed voters ignored the Republican appeal. This is the bitter payoff to the incredible political strategy of the White House during the past 10 months.

Although GOP Chairman Leonard Hall has all too correctly stated, "We are in trouble", there are some hopeful factors. One is that these election results come as a warning at a comparatively early date; there is time to reform the ranks before next year's congressional elections. Also, President Eisenhower may have a limited political knowledge, but he undoubtedly understands the term "to change the guard". The current Palace Guard has been around 10 months too long.

Another positive factor is to be seen in the reaction of the Democrats. The Northern Democrats are jubilant. But the Southern wing of the party quite clearly does not share this happiness. As the voters went to the polls, the Southern Governors, in conference at Hot Springs, manifested no such narrow partisan view of the Republican Administration. If Republican leaders are wise, they can widen and exploit the obvious North-South split in the Democratic Party.

On the Farm Front: None of the elections this week had any particular bearing on the political situation in agricultural areas. By this time, no serious student of political events believes that the election

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of a Democrat in Wisconsin had any significance as to Republican chances. The seat had been held by a La Follette Progressive for 25 years and was Republican only in name. The GOP could not lose anything they never had. So, a real test at the rural polls has not yet occurred.

Lacking any such electoral index, there is some disposition here to view the political situation in the farm field as less gloomy for the GOP than usually depicted. It is true that the showmanship of the Farmers' Union made it look as if there was a real farm revolt. But the "Cattleman's Caravan", it turned out, was not representative of the livestock men of the country, by any means.

Nevertheless, it was good political theater and did Benson's reputation no good. And more is to come, it is said. To succeed the Cattleman's Caravan there will descend on Washington next January a "Kilowatt Kavalcade". The Farmers' Union will have a hand in this stunt which will provide a platform for the Rural Electrification zealots, always seeking bigger Government handouts.

The fact is that Ezra Benson, however high his motives and admirable his tenacity, has little talent for dealing with such matters and apparently no talent for gathering a "public relations" team around him. The best defense is the attack, and Benson might better have gone forth to assault the sins of Brannan and the Democrats than to subbornly sit on the defensive. And why not an attack on the dervishes of the Farmers' Union? That group is by no means invulnerable. If the Jenner Committee, for instance, should publicly probe their record — fur would fly.

Be that as it may. Benson must produce some constructive scheme for agricultural relief before the next year's election campaign commences. The Woolman Plan, which we described in this space on October 7, has won much notice in the Department of Agriculture's top echelons. That plan is a scheme for subsidization, but of subsidizing so that the consumer would pay only once, not twice as under the New and Fair Deal schemes. The story goes that Mr. Herbert Hoover thought well enough of the Woolman Plan to send it with recommendations for study to Ezra Benson. More will be heard of this anon.

Not Merely Gossip: Reports that Governor Dewey now intends to retire from politics when his term is up are regarded as greatly exaggerated. It is noted that the reports sprang up following the exposure of connections between members of his administration in New York and Fay, the criminal labor extortioner. Therefore, the naive assume that Dewey wants to get out of the sordid political world and to practice law. But, old political observers believe that Dewey himself "planted the yarn" that he would retire. Why? In order that a movement would start to "draft" him and "make" him run again. So far, there are no "spontaneous" signs, but they may appear later, not spontaneously, but as planned.

● The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to General George C. Marshall is regarded here, by many, as an effort to rehabilitate the badly tattered reputation of a man who started the now discredited "giveaway" scheme in Europe, and whose policy in the Far East led to the capture of China by the Reds. As a matter of fact, the award seems to have had little effect in humbling the General's critics. Senator Jenner was queried by the press as to whether he had any comment on the award to Marshall. (Jenner two years ago attacked Marshall, calling him a "front man for traitors".) The Senator answered the AP by saying, "What I have said about Marshall still stands; it's on the record and documented. I never say anything unless I mean it. You know that."

● Bernard Shanley, the White House aide, is known to have been the man who tried to get Ike to give in to the labor bosses, for an emasculation of the Taft-Hartley Act — in a stirring episode which happened at the end of the last session of Congress. The Shanley maneuver was stopped by Capitol Hill. Shanley is the center of curiosity here — one of the "new faces". Of an old and wealthy Catholic family in New Jersey, he practiced law in Newark and was a backer of Harold Stassen's bid for GOP nomination. He reportedly gave the signal, at just the right moment in the Chicago convention, which swung the Stassen delegates to General Eisenhower. This act had a lot to do with the momentum of the Eisenhower bandwagon in charging to victory over Taft in the convention. To Shanley's friends is attributed now a drive to make him Governor in his native state.

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● Who wrote the now famous Jenner Committee report on "interlocking subversive spy rings" which appeared last August, was reproduced in entirety by the *U.S. News* and has achieved the astonishing circulation of 176,000 copies printed and distributed to date? Around town, there has been much curiosity (as there always is) as to who was primarily responsible among staff members for the able presentation of this story.

After much investigation, we learn that the "literary" author of the report was Bob McManus, one of the best men on the Committee staff. McManus had a brilliant record as a journalist before he joined the committee staff, having muckraked the subversives in the agricultural field, for the *Farm Journal*, in a notable series of pieces.

Stevens: The Secretary of the Army, Robert T. Stevens, is being watched with astonished interest and bated breath by veteran observers in the Capital. They are surprised because for the first time a high official seems genuinely desirous of eliminating subversives and is going all out to collaborate with Senator McCarthy in the probe of the Signal Corps. But one may be pardoned for holding one's breath, because such a phenomenon never occurred under Roosevelt and Truman. If an official of those Democratic regimes showed signs of doing something about the subversives in government, he was slapped down, or intimidated in some way or other, and disappeared from the scene entirely. Skeptics wonder if Stevens can continue his forthright work indefinitely without interference from "higher-ups".

Nevertheless, he talks well and convincingly, as thus on October 29th at Greenville, S.C., when he "promised no let up in a campaign to uncover disloyal personnel" (United Press, October 29). Stevens mentioned that he had been working with a Senate Committee — "in our effort to ferret out the disloyal", obviously referring to Senator McCarthy's investigation for Red spy rings at the Army's secret radar laboratories at Ft. Monmouth, N.J. The Secretary told the Greenville Chamber of Commerce that "recent revelations have understandably alarmed the American people".

And Stevens acts as if he meant what he said. Thus, there was the case of the officer in Army Personnel. When the McCarthy Committee sought information about personnel case histories, this officer said he would not give such information even if he had permission to do so. Soon afterward he was transferred to Germany. Then, General Partridge, head of G-2 (Military Intelligence) on the stand displayed appalling ignorance of the network of the Communist menace. He too has been taken from his post and sent abroad. In short, what is coming to be known in the Capital as the "Stevens way" is the reverse of that practiced by the New and Fair Deals, when the officials who had the "know how" and showed a will to root out the Reds were discouraged by orders from above. Now, Stevens apparently has served warning, by his attitude, of the fate which awaits those officials who are ignorant or timid in dealing with subversive situations.

Farm Supports: Clif Stratton, Washington correspondent of the Topeka *Daily Capital* (October 25) philosophizes on the developing farm crisis: "Some folks were surprised, some shocked, when the wheat growers voted, ratio of 89 to 11, for marketing quotas — and government support of wheat prices at about a dollar a bushel above a 'free market' level. They needn't have been. Wheat growers, like other groups, have been educated over two decades to believe the Government owes them a good income. Some folks were surprised, some shocked when a very vocal group of cattlemen demanded government support prices for cattle. They needn't have been. Cattlemen, who largely comprise the last group of individualists in the United States, have seen other groups feeding at the Government trough over the years, and decided they were entitled to 'get theirs' while the getting was good."

Stratton, continuing his "folks are shocked" refrain to project a future in which everything including automobiles and manufactured goods are "supported" and stored as "surplus", goes on: "For nearly a half-century, the Socialist doctrine that the 'world (government) owes we a living' has been gathering momentum in the United States. Particularly since the adoption of the Sixteenth Amendment (graduated income tax), a vehicle through which Government takes from the Haves and distributes among the

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Have-Nots. And when there no longer are any Haves to mulct, takes over the property, the income, the direction of thought and action of all the people, and finally takes over the people themselves — just as Joseph did the people of Egypt through the Welfare State he promoted nearly 40 centuries ago. Some folks are going to be surprised, some shocked, when they discover that Government can't give all these things to people, do all these things for people, without taking all said things from people, and doing unpleasant things to people."

Watch For: A book on the peoples of Soviet Russia by Eugene Lyons, *Our Secret Allies*, to be published by Duell, Sloan and Pierce late in November. Lyons, a contributor to HUMAN EVENTS, is a veteran among anti-Communist writers in the U.S. His *Assignment in Utopia* (1937) was one of the earlier books debunking Soviet Russia in the Thirties.

American Legion Reader, edited by Victor Lasky, co-author of *Seeds of Treason*, and a contributor to HUMAN EVENTS, will soon be published by Hawthorne Books, $4.95, or $3.95 for Legionnaires. It will contain the best articles, fiction and cartoons which have appeared in the American Legion Monthly through the years.

Ches Manly, *Chicago Tribune* correspondent at Lake Success, is writing a book on the United Nations for the Henry Regnery Company. Scheduled for publication in late winter. It will be the volume for which critics of the UN have been waiting.

Peace in Our Time: The people of the United States are beginning to feel much as did the British in the 1830's, after the long struggle of the Napoleonic Wars and the postwar period. Capt. Russell Grenfell in his interesting book, *Unconditional Hatred* (reviewed last week; published by Devin-Adair), has reproduced a passage from a letter from Sidney Smith, a witty writer of that epoch, to Lady Grey, wife of the British Premier Minister: "For God's sake, do not drag me into another war! I am worn down and worn out, with crusading and defending Europe, and protecting mankind: I *must* think a little of myself. I am sorry for the Spaniards — I am sorry for the Greeks — I deplore the fate of the Jews; the people of the Sandwich Islands are groaning under the most detestable tyranny; Bagdad is oppressed; I do not like the present stake of the Delta; Thibet is not comfortable. Am I to fight for all these people? The world is bursting with sin and sorrow. Am I to be Champion of the Decalogue, and to be eternally raising fleets and armies to make all men good and happy? We have just done saving Europe, and I am afraid the consequence will be that we shall cut each others' throats. No war, dear Lady Grey! — no eloquence, but apathy, selfishness, common sense, arithmetic! I beseech you, secure Lord Grey's swords and pistols, as the housekeeper did Don Quixote's armour."

Russo-German War: General W. Anders, Polish Commander, has written a fascinating book, *Hitler's Defeat in Russia* (Regnery, $4.00). One of the reasons why Hitler lost in the East was his failure to understand the need of creating an army of Russian deserters. But the Reichswehr did understand, and covertly encouraged the growth of the famous "Vlasov Army". Anders reveals some astonishing facts about the frantic desire of Russians to revolt and fight against the Soviet Government, even when Germany was falling. "Even in November, 1944", he says, "when it was clear that Germany was defeated, 60,000 Russians applied in a single day to be enlisted in the Vlasov army."

Col. Truman Smith, former U.S. Military Attaché in Berlin, in a vivid introduction to the book says: "The tragic fate of the Russian volunteers is one of the most poignant stories of World War Two. Most of them were turned over to Stalin's tender mercy after VE Day by order of the British and United States Governments. I doubt if there was any American action in the recent war, or any of its wars, which compares with this in thoughtless brutality and in harming our national interest!"

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